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Her Work and Value

By Jane A. Thompson



VENGURLE, INDIA.

The task of making Jesus Christ known to all the people of India is so stupendous that it would be quite impossible for the missionaries on the field and those whom the Home Church might send, to accomplish it. And of course it is not the idea of the Home Church nor of the workers on the field that all the work should be done by foreigners. There are many reasons why the native Christian is better fitted than the missionary for evangelizing his own people.

To begin with, he knows the language, its idioms and proverbs, and by their proper use is able to reach the depths of the heart where the missionary might only touch the surface with his strictly grammatical sentences. Then he knows the heart life of the people, their point of view, their hopes and ambitions, their superstition, prejudices and temptations, and this knowledge makes it possible for him to present the claims of Christ to the people in a more telling way than the missionary is able to do.

Of the various forms of work done by the Indian Christian, I believe that done by the Bible woman is the most far reaching. It is said that no nation rises higher than its women. If India is to be won for Christ, it is certain that her women must be won to Him and it is the native Bible woman to whom this opportunity comes.

Hindu women of all classes of society keep very close to their homes and so the Gospel message must be taken to them. Then they are very timid and afraid of the missionary until they learn something of us from the Bible woman. Every one knows there is a great gap between East and West. Well, in our work for women in India, this gap is bridged for us by our Bible women. We learn from them a great deal as to how to approach the people.

In a letter received recently one of our missionaries, who has had much experience in evangelistic work in India wrote, "I had a fresh glimpse of the value of an Indian Bible woman recently. Gangabai is only a beginner and not at all brilliant. She has, however, a wonderful knowledge of her Bible and a clear assurance that Jesus Christ is her own personal Savior. She and I went to the Mahar Wada and the people seemed quite indifferent—but—when she began to talk to them and told them what Jesus Christ had done for her (a woman of the same caste as themselves) and what she knew He could do for them if only they would believe on Him—you should have seen how they

woke up and listened and many were the questions she had to answer. Her plain face was radiant as she talked."

One new recruit writes "I had learned to sing 'Parni dya parni' 'Water, give me water'" a great favorite and after singing it one day the Bible woman asked the women if they understood what the hymn meant and then explained the Living Water and how it could be obtained.

A new missionary finds these native women invaluable while getting "broken in" to the queer, strange customs, catching the idiom, etc. Sewing classes, street meetings and social visits give excellent opportunities.

A good Bible woman is of untold value in places where a missionary would be absolutely helpless. About a year ago two of these women were sent to another town to search for a girl who had been spirited away for showing too great interest in Christianity.

One day, during the worst famine year in Kolhapur, Poonabai, the senior Bible woman was on her daily visit to homes in the city. In spite of hunger and direst poverty (or perhaps because of it), the women seemed more ready than ever to greet the dear cheerful, earnest little woman, who, with concertina accompaniment to her songs and with clear presentation of the Gospel, had already won their hearts. Near the group, in which were many ghastly looking children with death written on their faces, Poon-

abai, while speaking, noticed in the gutter the body of a wee child. "O yes," said the women, "that has been there since morning. It is dead." But Poonabai was leaving nothing to chance. She picked up the tragic object and soon discovered a spark of life. None made the least objection to her taking the child home with her, so Lakshmi was brought to the Children's Home on the Mission compound and after some weeks, during which she lay unconscious, she took up life again but permanently somewhat weakened physically and mentally by the experiences of that awful famine. Now, twenty years later, Lakshmi is cooking for the nurses in the Vengurle Hospital, and is filling a most useful place.

Poonabai assured us, before her death last year, that in the homes of the high caste where she had entrance, there were many secret believers. She was able to reach their hearts as a white woman, even with a like spirit, cannot hope to, and she was able to go and come more often without arousing suspicion and fear of our influence among the men.

Sometimes the Bible women are called upon to shelter women inquirers or women who have fled from unkind husbands; to look up the parents of our school children; to comfort the sick in the hospital; to teach the new converts the first steps in the Way and to give a helping hand to some older but weaker sister; sometimes they help in the primary schools and in teaching sewing

classes of women. But always they are ready to bear witness to the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. By bearing others' burdens and by helping the missionary bear hers, these women are daily fulfilling the law of Christ.

As soon as possible these Bible women should be supported by the native church itself, but until that can be brought about, and so long as there are so many unevangelized towns and villages, the missions must continue to employ them. ***Of course they cannot be assigned, for individual support to any contributor or society at home,*** for that would be contrary to the Board's plan for station support.

But will you not give more generously than ever, so that each mission station may have sufficient money to employ as many native workers as it is able, profitably to train and direct?

Price 2 cents.

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